Recovery of Iconic Places
The Importance of Placemaking in Town Planning

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Abstract*— A response to the crisis of civic architecture in the postwar period, the placemaking aims at reconciling man with his community and his city. Nowadays, creating such places is still needed to support formation of the modern civil society. To understand the process of designing unique places, it is particularly useful analyze some of the successful placemaking projects which do adapt former industrial sites to a new cultural function and which can sometimes be referred to as recovering of iconic places, giving a new life to the historically important places. This is, for example, the case of placing the European Solidarity Centre on the grounds of the famous Gdańsk Shipyard or reusing a vast area of a former coal mine to raise a modern cultural district in the city of Katowice. To create these unique places, as the analysis proves, the architects have taken into account the indications originating from the site analysis and have incorporated them into the design, balancing them with contemporary architectural and technological solutions. Derived from the character of their particular locations, the unique places are not only public spaces, but can sometimes become icons for the local society.

***Index Terms*—place-form, placemaking, public space, town planning, architectural design.**

I. Making Places. Beginnings.

Defined as art of creating unique places that attract people by offering them a sense of belonging to the society and being "spaces that you can remember, that you can care about and make a part of your life" [10, p. xii], placemaking was a response to the crisis of civic architecture in the postwar period. The will to restore the social significance of public space pushed some architects to search for the New monumentality. A question was raised whether an architectural monument could express aspirations of the society, whether it could strengthen the sense of its identity. The importance that a group of postwar architects attributed to the monument was accompanied by the notion of landmark. Often assigned to an institution, the role of urban landmark inspired the search for the New monumentality. Simultaneously, the debate on the place to identify with was raised. Already in the 1950s, a couple of British architects, Alison and Peter Smithsons, took aim at the restitution of the place, which they found essential so as to realize "the task of our [their] generation", which was to "re-identify man with his house / his community / his city." [11, p. 419, the author quotes "Urban Re-Identification", a text published in 1955 by the Smithsons]. As remarked by Sarah Ksiazek, the interest in the monument, understood as an urban and a social landmark, was accompanied by the emergence of two aesthetic models: new humanism and regionalism [11, p. 420]. While the first had recourse to the language of the Italian Renaissance, in which a potential to restore the architecture's institutional value was identified, the other sought inspiration in the specificity of the region.

II. Critical Regionalism and the Notion of the Place.

Derived from the latter of the two mentioned models was the trend of critical regionalism, advocated by Kenneth Frampton, Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre. Aiming to combine the contribution of the modern movement with local heritage, this tendency seeks to derive inspiration from the site's characteristic features, including its climate and light as well as its both cultural and built heritage. At the same time, however, it remains contrary to imitating traditional forms of vernacular architecture. Focused on achieving "a self-conscious synthesis between universal civilization and world culture" [5, p. 25], critical regionalism considered this balance as the groundwork for conceiving identifiable places, defined by Kenneth Frampton as place-forms. Opposed to the infinite development of indifferent urban structure, which is associated with the concept of megalopolis, the place constitutes both urban as well as social landmark. The role that collective memory plays within the concept of the place is underlined by Aldo Rossi, according to whom a place (*locus*) is defined not only by its space-time, but equally "by its topographic dimension and its form, by the fact of being the place of human history, both old and new, by its memory" [13, p. 145]. Nourished by the experience of some postmodern architects, critical regionalism develops the notion of the place. Assuming integration of architecture with its environment, the concept gains an important human element that

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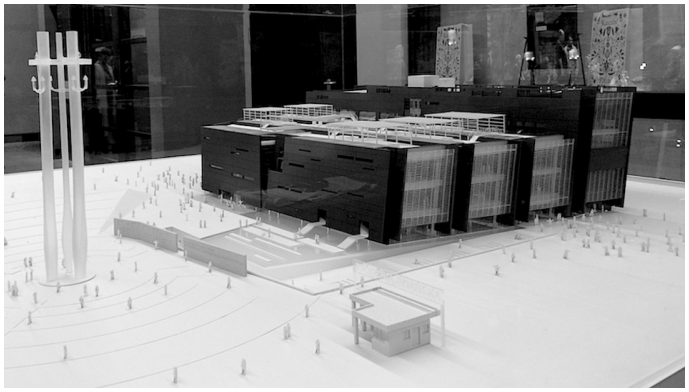


Fig. 1. European Solidarity Centre, PPW FORT. Model.



Fig. 2. European Solidarity Centre, PPW FORT.

is the collective memory. Defined as spaces that are inscribed in the consciousness of their habitants, places constituted a response some postwar architects addressed to the contemporary crisis of social identity and to the developing mass culture.

III. Placemaking Today.

Nowadays, the multitude of architectural trends, which often remain in contradiction one to another, might conceal the fact that architects cannot escape from the social responsibility inherent to their profession. Not only do they define the quality of space we live in, but they also provide a reflection of the society within their designs for public spaces. And, furthermore, the built environment that architects create influence people's awareness of community and of themselves as well. For this reason, it can be said that the architects have power to "situate a person socially and personally" [7, p. 207], which constitutes one among key principles of placemaking. Providing spaces of appropriate quality that would meet the users' needs and ambitions and could eventually be adopted by the society as the *locus* of its history does nonetheless require implementation of certain analytic tools and design methods. They can be summarized under the term of placemaking, which describes the creation of unique places, capable to attract individuals by offering them a sense of belonging to the society. Rediscovering these tools and methods can be extremely useful even nowadays, when "we are good at putting up buildings but we are bad at making places" [8]. Or, as Lyndon and Moore admitted, "much of what is built now is too tepid to be remembered" [10, p. xii]. Facing the difficult task to succeed in placemaking, arises the question what design methods and features can potentially "upgrade" a public space in order for it to be considered by its users as a place that makes part of their lives, a place to be remembered and cared for. First of all, creating unique places needs referring to people's collective memory, which can be supported by making use of the site's cultural heritage, including its various dimensions, e.g. local history, urban form typology, architectural standards and typical building materials.

IV. Catch the Invisible. The Site's Potential.

The location's inner potential can be used in many ways by both architects and town-planners. It can deliver inspirations when it comes to the building form or materials selection, but it can equally be the project's origin, its inception. Such is the case of large postindustrial plots, for example, which used to contain important plants, often becoming the town's identity, its recognizable image, and which now call for adaptation. Best if their reuse projects could maintain the character of site's original purpose, so as to recall its iconic significance, embedded in the collective memory from generations. The location's cultural heritage, not necessarily tangible, is therefore one of the important elements to be taken into consideration while attempting to build identifiable places, or place-forms, as defined by Frampton. In urban planning, place-forms do usually play the role of landmarks, facilitating citizens to comprehend the spatial organization of the city and forming canvas on which their individual subconscious maps representing the urban system are based. Deriving from local heritage may take different forms and can be addressed to its various elements. Among others, the industrial heritage has proved to have a great potential to be converted into new projects of cultural districts and institutions. Successful adaptive reuse projects of postindustrial sites do nonetheless require to be subjected to a number of rules. Most of all, it is necessary to maintain the right scale of the new development. Moreover, the form composition as well as used materials can be suggestive of the place's past ethos of a workplace for many. The site's successful revitalization, which relies largely on the fineness of architectural design, results in creation of a unique place while using its past as a symbol.

V. Industrial Heritage, Institutions and the City.

The industrial heritage sites and buildings located within city limits constitute important element of the urban space that is shared not only by their employees, but by the more broadly understood public. Rooted deep in the collective consciousness, industrial buildings of a neighborhood can be referred to as its important landmarks, on a par with the cultural institutions,

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Fig. 3. European Solidarity Centre, PPW FORT.

green spaces and infrastructure. The industrial heritage as well as the new industrial investments within a city do therefore contribute to the complexity of its various subconscious maps, which remain personal to each individual despite of being built of same elements. Being landmarks on which such maps are based, these buildings do also add to the notion of the place, as defined by Moore and Lyndon. Because people tend to identify themselves with the place they live and work in, the quality and characteristic features of these places have a great impact on their self-esteem as well as on their sense of community. The changing economic model, and particularly the transformation of the twentieth-century corporate model into the post-industrial one which was marked by a retreat from mass production in favor of commercializing unique, customized designs and innovative ideas, has brought some of the large-scale industrial plants to cessation during last decades. Additionally, the need to protect the cities' downtowns from pollution has resulted in placing new restrictions on industrial plants' location. The large-scale industries did therefore tend to withdraw from the cities, leaving behind vast and often degraded spaces. The revitalization of such areas relies significantly on adapting them to new functions and is aimed to bring benefits to the local communities. Especially, the revival of former industrial sites is supposed to improve urban landscape as well as to commence a social and economic activation process in their proximity. However, choosing the right new functionality calls for a thorough study at various levels. A special interest shall be borne to the citygenic role of cultural institutions which usually can easily appropriate former industrial areas. Taking into consideration the significance of these sites for the local community, the choice of a cultural function, addressed to the public, proves to give remarkable effects of successful placemaking. At the same time, the quality of design proposed for reused postindustrial sites should be no less thought out than the architecture designed for city institutions. Nowadays, it seems particularly important to search for such architectural solutions that are suitable to inspire the contemporary information society. Modern and innovative, the architectural design for these buildings shall also have the potential to induce a sense of identification among their users. Eventually, some of the successful placemaking projects that adapt former industrial sites to a new cultural function can be referred to as recovering iconic places, giving a new life to the historically important places. This is, for example, placing the European Solidarity Centre on the grounds of the famous Gdańsk Shipyard, installing the Jewish Museum in the former Schindler's manufacture in Cracow or reusing a vast area left behind the former coal mine of the city of Katowice to raise its modern cultural district. It seems interesting to have a more careful regard to a couple of examples.

A. European Solidarity Center (ECS) in Gdansk, design by studio PPW FORT.

Following Gdańsk Shipyard's closure in the 1990s, seventy hectares of land left behind have been subject to numerous development plans. A portion of that area was allocated to the intended construction of a museum dedicated to the "Solidarity" movement. The selected plot lies near the Memorial to the Fallen Shipbuilders as well as to the Shipyard's main gate which witnessed the historic speech by Lech Wałęsa. Emotionally charged and extremely important for Polish people, the selected site obliged the architects to a particularly prudent attitude towards the design. As the building's main designer, Wojciech Targowski, admits, its volume and shape result directly from accepting the dominant role of the existing Memorial and the surrounding plaza with its historic wall [2, p. 38]. For this reason, the building's main facade does not face the plaza but it turns to the side, forming background to the Memorial (fig. 1). Another important issue relied on balancing the significant layer of architecture so as not to make it banal. Because the Solidarity movement was universal and combined all social groups, its museum required spaces of mass character, appealing and comprehensible to the general public. Fitted to suit the site's past usage, the museum's industrial character and aesthetics is primarily expressed by the use of steel construction elements and corten steel sheets as finishing material (fig. 2). Bringing to mind ships under construction, the museum's bare architecture makes also reference to the ethos of hard work, still alive in most post-communist countries. At the same time, the building's slanted walls (fig. 3) are intended to resemble slanted letters of the Solidarity logo. Inside, the location's industrial past is also evoked by the proportions of multiple-storey high interiors, steel-framed window openings and skylights and apparent equipment installations. The imaginary voice of the building's *architecture parlante* is moreover increased by the humming noise of air-conditioning. Last but not least, the access to the new complex leads through a preserved Shipyard's gate, the image of which, surrounded by protesting crowds is ingrained within the collective memory of at least one nation.

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Fig. 4. Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra Building, Tomasz Konior. Main concert hall.



Fig. 5. Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra Building, Tomasz Konior. Foyer.

B. Katowice Coal Mine and the City's new Cultural Quarter.

The city of Katowice is habitually identified with its coal mining heritage, which has once built its economic position within the region and the country. However, from more than fifty coal mines established within its limits only three are still operating [4]. Although most of its coal mines have been closed by nowadays, the city of Katowice, as well as the region of Silesia where it is situated, are still associated with mining, which may therefore be defined as its important, if not most important, cultural heritage. When the coal mine named "Katowice" closed its premises in 1999 after more than one hundred and seventy years of operation, not only its vast area near Katowice city center was left a wasteland with no use, but, what was even more complicated, an important part of the city's cultural heritage has vanished. Taking into consideration its convenient location as well as its symbolical past, the area was soon decided to contain three important cultural institutions: the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra (NOSPR), the Silesian Museum and the International Conference Centre (MCK). When it comes to the first of these three organizations, the NOSPR Orchestra was founded in 1935 in Warsaw and has since then been performing in many different halls, reusing existing buildings which most often had sub-standard acoustics. Its new building in Katowice, finally a proper seat for the Orchestra, was designed by the architects from Tomasz Konior's studio. Accordingly to the author's intention, the building is composed of a few layers. Having the great concert hall for its heart, it is subsequently surrounded by a ring of distributive spaces, by the facade and the landscaped terrain. Each of these four layers has a distinct character and is related to each other by functional links. The inner volume, that is the building's heart, consists of an opaque and autonomic mass of graphite concrete walls on which the timber formwork has imprinted wood pattern so as to memorize the mine's woodyard that used to be situated right under the NOSPR new seat. Inside the great concert hall (fig. 4), dark graphite walls made of acoustic concrete have a rippling pattern which brings to mind the layers of coal, while timber finishings remind the traditional use of timber pillars in mining industry. The building's second layer is its distributive ring, which is servant in relation to the inner volume, has bright and modern interiors (fig. 5) that form a background to the dark concrete mass of the concert hall. The third layer, which is the building's facade, plays a particularly important role that is to maintain relations with the environment. Based in Katowice, the architect had an extensive knowledge on the Silesian architectural heritage as well as the widespread use of brick and therefore decided to select this material for the building's exterior. To maintain its contemporary character, however, the designer opted for a rhythm of window slits, continuous from the ground to the building's top, interchanged with brick pillars, instead of proposing traditional windows. Deriving inspiration from local dwellings, the sides of the brick pillars were decided to be painted red. Finally, the rest of the NOSPR site was reservedly landscaped so as to provide several resting places for visitors as well as convenient access to the car parks and to the other two institutions of the new Cultural Quarter, the Silesian Museum on one side and the MCK on the other. When it comes to the architectural project elaborated by Riegler Riewe Architekten for the Silesian Museum, it does also discreetly refer to the mining heritage of the region by the fact that most of its spaces are underground, with a few glass boxes and skylights protruding above the ground level. Together with a preserved mine shaft they form a group of simple angular volumes, composed over the surface of the Museum's green roof. A similar approach to the symbolically important site of former Katowice Coal Mine has been adopted by the designers from JEMS Architekci studio in their project of the International Conference Centre. Realized mostly with dark graphite or black materials, like steel, expanded metal mesh, asphalt or concrete, this building was described by one among its authors as a "black block that has been cut through by a ribbon of green valley" [3, p. 40]. The "green valley" mentioned by the architect is a parametric cutout within the building's rectangular volume, introducing many slanted, irregularly shaped surfaces covered with a lawn. The idea to cut through the building originated from an intention to open a new viewing axis, starting from the existing arena called Spodek

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(Saucer), built in the 1970s, and extending towards one of the city's historic neighborhoods.

VI. Conclusions.

The success of the two described examples of adapting former industrial sites to new cultural and public functions relies on their capacity to become place-forms. Being public space that attract citizens by offering them a sense of belonging to the society, such unique places make part of people's lives, what makes them worth remembering and being cared for. Nowadays, creating place-forms is needed so as to support formation of the modern and responsible society, to reconcile people to their city, to their home. For these and other reasons, urban designers and architects shall join their efforts to counter the placelessness of our cities today. To achieve the desired effect, the principles of critical regionalism might be a recourse. According to them, contemporary spaces shall be realized with modern technologies and contemporary architectural language, being at the same time rooted in the local heritage. It is, therefore, particularly important to identify site's heritage and potential before commencing any design and development. The knowledge of location's former uses in the context of the city's past and cultural heritage can be the richest source of original inspirations, providing guidelines concerning the building's form as well as its right scale and often predetermining the selection of finishing materials. Taking into account the indications originating from the site analysis and incorporating them into the design, however without exaggeration, balancing them with contemporary architectural and technological solutions, it is possible to create a unique place. Derived from the character of its particular location, a place-form has the ability to be accepted by the local society, being for them more than a building and not only an identifiable public space but also a kind of pictogram. And finally, a network of such iconic places is a foundation of the city's subconscious maps, personal to every individual. Leading from one important space to another, these maps constitute the basis on which to orientate within the city.

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